

Message Text

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61

ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID

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TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJECT: GOS CANCELS PRESS CONFERENCE BY SOCIALIST LEADER

1. IN AN EARLY TEST OF THE GOS' POST-FRANCO ATTITUDE TOWARD PRESS FREEDOM, THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION CANCELED A SCHEDULED PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY, NOV 26, BY FELIPE GONZALEZ, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY (PSOE), BEFORE THE MADRID FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT'S ASSOCIATION.

2. THE MINISTRY ALSO CLOSED DOWN FOR FIVE DAYS THE FOREIGN PRESS CLUB, WHICH IT OPERATES AS A SERVICE TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS AND OTHER PRESS-RELATED GROUPS IN MADRID. THE CLUB BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS FOR THE CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION, WAS TO BE THE SITE OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

3. THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION SAID, ACCORDING TO A CORRESPONDENTS ASSOCIATION STATEMENT, THAT THE MEETING COULD NOT BE HELD BECAUSE PRIOR AUTHORIZATION HAD NOT BEEN GIVEN BY GOS. THE STATEMENT ADDED THAT THE PRESS CLUB WAS CLOSED DOWN BECAUSE ITS PERSONNEL WERE NEEDED TO HELP OPERATE A PRESS CENTER SET UP TO ASSIST REPORTERS COVERING EVENTS RELATED TO FRANCO'S FUNERAL AND JUAN CARLOS' INVESTITURE.

4. HARRY DEBELIUS, PRESIDENT OF THE CORRESPONDENT'S ASSOCIATION,

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WAS QUOTED AS SAYING, "IT SEEMS TO ME THIS WAS A DOUBLE ACTION TO

MAKE SURE THE NEWS CONFERENCE IS NOT HELD BEFORE THE CEREMONIES THURSDAY HONORING JUAN CARLOS".

5. CONTACTS TOLD EMBASSY PRESS OFFICER THAT INFORMATION MINISTRY THREATENED TO SEND POLICE TO BREAK UP PRESS CONFERENCE IF CORRESPONDENT'S ASSOCIATION INSISTED ON HOLDING IT IN VIOLATION OF GOVERNMENT ORDERS.

6. GONZALES' PRESS CONFERENCE WAS SCHEDULED AS THE FIRST OF A SERIES WITH IMPORTANT OPPOSITION AND REGIME LEADERS TO GET THEIR VIEWS ON POST-FRANCO SPAIN. FRAGA IRIBARNE IS SCHEDULED TO MEET WITH ASSOCIATION MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, AS SECOND SPEAKER. DEBELIUS SAID HE WOULD RECOMMEND TO ASSOCIATION'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS CANCELLATION OF THAT MEETING TO PREVENT GOS FROM EXPLOITING CORRESPONDENTS AS EXCLUSIVE FORUM FOR REGIME FIGURES. HE ALSO SAID BOARD WOULD CONSIDER REGISTERING FORMAL PROTEST WITH GOS OVER CANCELLATION GONZALES' PRESS CONFERENCE.

7. NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT HENRY GINIGER TOLD EMBASSY PRESS OFFICER HE AND LARGE GROUP OF OTHER CORRESPONDENTS DID NOT RECEIVE WORD OF CANCELLATION AND SHOWED UP AS SCHEDULED ONLY TO FIND PRESS CLUB CLOSED. SHORTLY THEREAFTER PSOE REP CARLOS ZAYAS APPEARED TO SAY PARTY WOULD ISSUE A WRITTEN STATEMENT WITHIN AN HOUR AT BAR ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE PRESS CLUB. WHILE THE NEWSMEN AWAITED AT THE BAR, FOUR POLICEMEN ENTERED, ASKED FOR PRESS CREDENTIALS AND REITERATED WARNING THAT NO PRESS CONFERENCE COULD BE HELD THERE. THE NEWSMEN REPLIED THEY WERE ONLY HAVING A DRINK AT THE BAR.

8. IN REPLY TO CANCELLATION OF PRESS CONFERENCES, UPI QUOTED UNNAMED SOCIALIST LEADER AS SAYING, "IT IS HARD TO TELL EXACTLY HOW THE GOVERNMENT IS GOING TO TREAT US. SOMETIMES THEY LOOK THE OTHER WAY, OTHER TIMES THEY CRACK DOWN. WE ARE ILLEGAL BUT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ACTIVITY AND CONTACT WITH THE PRESS GETS BY."

9. COMMENT: THIS INCIDENT IS THE FIRST OF WHAT MAY BE REPEATED ATTEMPTS THAT WILL BE MADE IN COMING WEEKS TO TEST THE GOS' INTENTIONS TO MOVE AHEAD WITH THE LIBERALIZATION THAT POLITICAL OPPOSITION GROUPS HAVE SO LONG ADVOCATED WITH STRONG SUPPORT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FROM SPANISH PRESS AND THE TACIT BACKING OF FOREIGN PRESS CORPS BASED HERE.
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